

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

6 June 1984

Visit of Chinese Defense Minister [redacted]

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Summary

Beijing sees the Washington visit of Defense Minister Zhang Aiping as an important symbol of the improved bilateral relationship and expanding Chinese-US cooperation. Zhang is a strong advocate of China's military modernization effort and his close ties to top leaders insure that his views get a careful hearing in policy circles. During his meetings in Washington, Zhang is likely to continue pressing for access to state-of-the-art US military technology but will probably leave discussion of specific programs to the ongoing, working-level negotiations. He is adamantly opposed, however, to the purchase of foreign arms without the production technology and has used his influence to block efforts by the Navy and Air Force to purchase outright advanced weapons systems from abroad. [redacted]

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Objectives of Zhang's Visit

Beijing views the visit of Defense Minister Zhang Aiping as a means of furthering the political momentum in bilateral relations fostered by the exchange of visits between Premier Zhao and President Reagan. Zhang also will probably reflect China's recent interest in a carefully calibrated increase in military ties with the US. As Zhang told [redacted] Secretary [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the China Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Research was completed on 6 June 1984. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, China Division, OEA, [redacted]

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[redacted]  
DIA review completed.

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Weinberger's visit has created a "good foundation" for US-China military cooperation, and Zhang wishes to reciprocate while in Washington.

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Nonetheless, Zhang's ability now to press forward with more explicit military ties with the US is limited. Chinese leaders still want to maintain the image of their "independent" foreign policy and to avoid overly close public identification with the US. As China moves toward closer security cooperation with the US, Chinese leaders will probably stress publicly their desire that China does not wish to "attach" itself to any major power. Premier Zhao reiterated these views in his address to the recent Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress. Further, some groups within the Foreign Ministry--and probably the leadership--oppose the visibly closer security ties that extensive arms purchases or the appearance of military collaboration would symbolize.

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Thus, the Chinese are unlikely to raise any major new topics during Zhang's visit but will be looking for new indications that the United States is prepared to export advanced military technology to China. Zhang is reportedly optimistic that the US will approve a high level of military technology transfer but is still uncertain exactly what the US is willing to provide.

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### Zhang's Career

We believe that, based on his 55-year military career, Zhang is highly respected by senior Chinese civilian leaders and military officers and his views on the equipment modernization of the Chinese armed forces carry considerable weight. Zhang is 74 years old, a native of Sichuan Province and has been a party member since 1928. He commanded a regiment during the Long March (1934-5) and, before becoming a deputy chief of staff in Beijing in 1955, served in various regional military roles including commander of the fledgling PLA Navy from 1949-1952.

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Zhang Aiping was appointed Minister of National Defense and a deputy secretary general of the Military Commission of the Chinese Communist Party in late 1982 after over two decades as a key administrator of China's conventional and nuclear weapons research organizations. Although the post of Defense Minister is largely ceremonial, Zhang has used his influence as a key member of the Military Commission--and his long experience as manager of scientific and technical programs--to consolidate quickly all responsibility for the management of military research, development, and production under the newly created National Defense Science, Technology and Industry Commission (NDSTIC). Zhang holds no official position in the NDSTIC.

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[REDACTED] US defense officials report that Chinese officials have told them that his health is delicate and that the Defense Minister is not capable of walking more than short distances. According to the US defense attache in Beijing, Zhang Aiping will probably retire sometime next year. [REDACTED]

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### Zhang's Entourage

Zhang's entourage includes several key individuals who are likely to play important roles in future negotiations even after Zhang Aiping's retirement.

- Wu Shaozu is the vice-chairman of the NDSTIC directly responsible for acquisition of foreign military technology. Wu is a close associate of Party Secretary Hu Yaobang and reportedly is being groomed by Hu Yaobang to eventually succeed Zhang Aiping as Defense Minister.
- Zhang Pin is one of Defense Minister Zhang's three children and is also an official in the NDSTIC. Zhang Pin led the Chinese work team for Sino-American military technology cooperation which visited the United States [REDACTED]

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- Zhang Zhen is senior deputy chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army and is responsible for operations. Zhang stands in for the Chief of General Staff Yang Dezhi when Yang is away from Beijing. According to the US attache, Zhang is a likely candidate to replace the aging Chief of Staff within the next two years. [REDACTED]

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### Stance on Weapons Modernization

The Defense Minister is on record as opposed to massive weapons imports and views China's military industrial base as the foundation from which to build the military modernization program. As former administrator of nuclear weapons and space programs, Zhang points with obvious pride to China's achievements in self-sufficiently building a nuclear arsenal and launching a geostationary communications satellite. Zhang concedes that China must import some needed military technology as China's forces "lag behind" the industrialized countries but he rejects the idea of large-scale weapons imports as "unrealistic" and exhorts Chinese industry to be self-reliant in the production of

needed weapons. He recently predicted a marked improvement in conventional weapons in the next two years and achievement of "world advanced levels" by 1990. Zhang appears to be counting on an increased emphasis on indigenous research and development programs as well as selected technology procurement from abroad to achieve these ambitious goals. [redacted]

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Supported by the civilian leadership, Zhang has reportedly fought in the last 18 months with the Air Force and Navy, which wish to improve capabilities rapidly through weapons purchases. Late in 1982, the Navy signed a tentative contract to purchase the British Sea Dart naval defense missile for its destroyers. US attaches report that Zhang used the NDSTIC to block the purchase and also canceled Air Force negotiations with the French for Mirage fighters. [redacted] Zhang does not oppose foreign procurement but is far more committed to ensuring that China acquires the domestic capabilities to produce modern weapons than such men as Air Force Chief of Staff Zhang Tingfa who has pressed for a direct procurement approach to introduce sophisticated weapons into the inventory as soon as possible. [redacted]

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SUBJECT: Visit of Chinese Defense Minister

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